



Designing *myBonnechere.ca*: An information needs assessment for a watershed website

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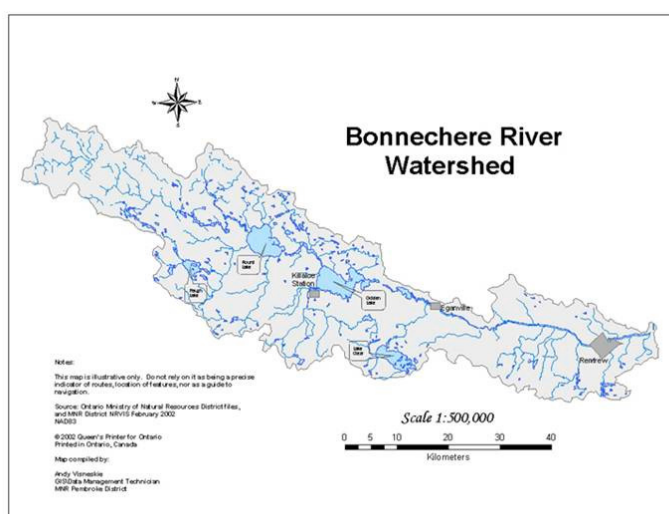
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Key Words

Mapping, Pile Sorting, Ranking, Option Domain, The Wheel, Forum, Civic Engagement, Consulting, Canada, watershed management, Bonnechere River, website development, information needs, environmental education

Context

- The Bonnechere River Watershed Project (BRWP) is an incorporated, not-for-profit organization that supports projects in partnership with community groups and organizations that are stewards of the Bonnechere River watershed.
- The BRWP identified a gap that it wanted to fill, namely to provide potential users of the river a way to help BRWP develop a long term vision of information needs that could then be used to guide development of a website. This would help BRWP to implement its overall commitment to environmental education and community engagement.



Question

What are the information needs of potential users of a website that supports environmental education and community engagement in planning and management of the Bonnechere River watershed?

Tools

- Mapping
- Pile Sorting and Ranking
- Option Domain
- The Wheel

Participants

16 people participated in a workshop that was held in response to an invitation to stakeholder groups in the Bonnechere River watershed.



Examples of results

Participatory mapping allowed participants to identify places of importance from the mouth of the river to areas farther away in Bonnechere Provincial Park. The stories of these places and the reasons they were important to participants grounded the identification of information needed so that citizens could continue to enjoy these places.

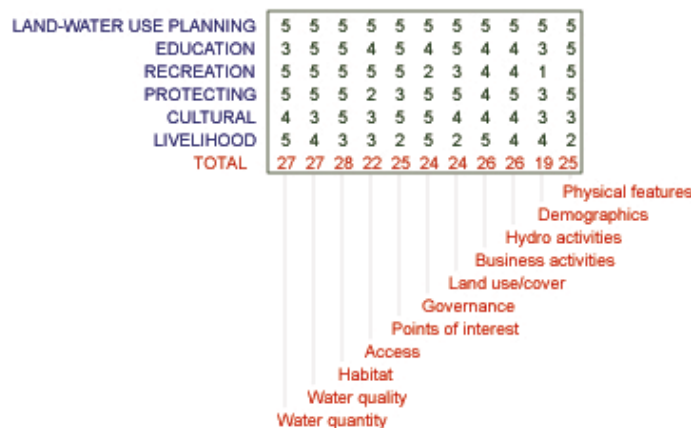


Using **Pile Sorting**, participants identified various types of information needs. The most frequently-mentioned information needs were water quality and quantity measures, information on access points, and information on governance of the watershed. The importance and relevance of information to the interests of stakeholders reflected the river's strong dependence the regulation and governance of water flows, concerns about persistent, low-level pollution, and uncertainty about the balance of public and private access to the river's edge.

Option Domain helped participants further categorize the information types by discussing different purposes for which information on the watershed can be used. Participants rated the extent to which certain types of information are useful for each purpose, on a scale of 1 for less useful to 5 for more useful. The higher the total at the bottom, the more widely useful the information type was.

Information on water quality, water quantity, and wildlife had the highest total ratings, suggesting that these types of information are useful for many different purposes. Few low scores were given for any relationship.

"The information needs of potential users of a website on the Bonnechere Watershed"



The Wheel allowed participants to represent five spaces on a hypothetical website where each spoke represented a particular purpose for which information can be used. Each person rated each spoke on a scale of 0 to 10, taking into account the frequency at which they would consult the space on the web site and the topic's importance to them. Groups with similar interests were then formed by comparing Wheels. Each group came up with an animal or bird mascot to represent their group. Five profiles emerged that seemed to capture the core interests and character of potential users of the website:

- Protectors and Educators (Silver Wolf)
- Activist Educators (Goshawk and Owl)

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- Passionate Recreationalists (Busy Beaver)
 - Contemplative Recreationalists (Loon)
 - Teachers of the Spirit (Beaver)



Outcomes

- Recommendations emerged from participants for both content and design of the website.
- The information needs and interests of participants were wide-ranging, comprehensive, and loosely structured. No single interest and corresponding information need was dominant. This suggested that design of the website should consider ways of creating spaces that can reflect various combinations of interests.
- Participants expressed general satisfaction with the day. Their one-word summaries included: encouraged, affirmed, included, hopeful, happy, enlightened, grateful, optimistic, engaged, thankful, and impressed.
- Participants' concerns included feeling overwhelmed by the task ahead and disappointed that more attention had not been given to creating baseline data.

Contributions of SAS² to the process

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- A deeper and more satisfying level of engagement of participants through the opportunity to share personal stories, opinions and values using a variety of SAS tools.
 - Feedback from the Ontario Trillium Foundation grants officer on how much she enjoyed reading the report of the event.